

CONSERVATION-RESTORATION OF ROMANIAN PAINTED WOODEN HANGER FROM FĂGĂRAȘ COUNTY

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Abstract:

The paper presents a case study of conservation-restoration for a polychrome hanger from Lisa village. It belongs to category of Transylvanian Romanian painted furniture, with a simple floral ornamentation and different types of lines. The painting technique seems to be directly on wood, without a preparation layer. The artefact was in a quite good initial conservation state. The polychrome surface presented different degradations leading to few colour separations or loss of the floral drawing, to fissures, dirt and stains. The back side accumulated a lot of dirt and biological degradations were present. The conservation-restoration process included: consolidation of paint layer, cleaning, curative and preventive treatment and consolidation of fragile wood, grouting, chromatic integration and varnishing.

Key words: traditional furniture; polychrome wood; hanger; conservation; restoration.

INTRODUCTION

The painted furniture from Transylvania in the European context is a result of evolution in this field, especially in Germanic communities. This kind of artistic manufactures evolved in conformity with artistic taste, traditional values and local needs. The Transylvanian specific culture, generated by the living in the same geographical area of Romanians, Saxons and Hungarians influenced and left their mark on painted furniture. Therefore, traditional polychrome furniture takes a variety of forms and models. The richest period for painted furniture manufacturing dated from XVIII - XIX centuries and the beginning of XXth century, when specialised carpentry centres were formed in Bistrița, Cluj, Sibiu Sighisoara, Mediaș, Brașov and Rupea regions (Malearov and Ștefan 2012, Frîncu 2011). They made individual furniture according to demand or standard. The ornamentation was dominated by floral or vegetal motifs coming from the Renaissance period: tulip as a symbol of pride and hospitality, rose - the sign of love and joy, carnation, lily of the valley, pomegranate, acanthus leaf or flower, poppy flower, stalks (Negoescu 2012). The main colours as background were: brown, red, blue or green. The symbol frequently encountered was the *tree of life* represented by flower bouquets or pots (Fig. 1). Geometrical motifs as lines, points, curves, other inscriptions also occurred.



Fig. 1.

Images with tree of life in different representations (from objects belonging to collection of Astra Museum and Sacele Museum).

All these symbols emphasise the Saxon or Hungarian character of Transylvanian painted furniture.

In Romanian houses painted furniture appeared later, towards the end of the XVIIIth century in Transylvanian Romanian centres as Rășinari (Sibiu), Bran, Olt Valley. The specific ornaments were: poppy

flower - the symbol of the night, chicory - the sign of hope, lily - the symbol of innocence, rose - the symbol of love and beauty, the entire decoration being different from the Saxon or Hungarian ones. The manner of painting is simpler with shapes similar to the natural ones or symbolic. The background colour was green - olive or dark blue, or red - brown (Malearov and Ștefan 2012, Frîncu 2011). Generally, the colours are darker or coloured spaces alternate with natural coloured wood (Bodiu 2006). The manner of painting and appearance of ornaments are, sometimes, stylised. In the context of freehand drawing the floral symbols are asymmetrical, but regular (Bodiu 2006).

The painted furniture was kept unaltered in Transylvanian houses until the beginning of XXth century, when new veneered furniture penetrates the market. Now, the diversity of polychrome furniture is displayed in many museums in Transylvania or in particular collections (<https://muzeulastra.ro/>, <https://www.etnobrasov.ro/muzeu/>).

The topic of conservation- restoration of polychrome furniture is distinct and challenging and must be approached with gentleness and professionalism. A multitude of degradations with different causes or inappropriate interventions initiate severe consequences on the integrity of the objects and diminish their artistic and cultural value (Olaru 2014, Timar 2003).

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this paper is to present a case-study of conservation - restoration for a painted hanger from Romanian heritage. The main restoration challenges, specific for polychrome wood were highlighted.

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Each traditional Romanian interior include a lot of objects utilitarian or decorative, produced by inhabitants: furniture, textiles decorated with motifs and chromatics specific to each geographic area, cooking and eating objects or weaving. A common piece of furniture, indispensable in the peasant houses is the hanger for clothes or pottery. Some of them are simple, made of a single piece of wood with hooks from metal or wood or with a secondary horizontal element for plates placing and displaying (Fig. 2). The object is originated from Lisa village, situated in Land of Fagaraș, a place full of history, spirituality and traditions (Ștefureac 2015, Sorea and Csesznek 2020). It is dating probably from the beginning of XXth century (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2.

Hanger from peasant interiors, similar with the case study, with a superior element for plates exhibition (<https://intraconstruct.ro/blog/renovari-case-traditionale-romanesti-in-50-imagini/>).



Fig. 3.

The painted hanger considered in this study (initial state).

It is made from resinous wood with dimensions of 150cm long and 30cm wide and has a fix construction. The following parts compose the object: a main rectangular front board with holes for fixing along the wall and 7 metallic hooks (1), two elements fixed by the first to create a cornice with a round edges

(2) and on the top there are two vertical short elements (3) lap jointed with the upper horizontal element for plate's exhibition (4). The joints were fixed by nails and very rough.

The front surface is covered by painting. The technique seems to be simple, directly on wood, without a preparation layer. In this situation, a typical rough surface could be prepared on purpose for a better adhesion of the priming layers. Primarily the artisan used a blue, green and red-brown background and after he overpainted floral and vegetal motifs on the main board, or geometrical lines on the upper elements. The ornamental floral motifs occur in red, white and blue colours. Most likely the hanger was cut in the latest years because the drawing is interrupted on the both ends (Fig. 3). It was a common practice to relocate the object, because the initial dimensions were as large as the room.

Initial state of conservation

The degradation causes are numerous starting with quality of materials, manufacturing technique, ageing phenomenon and external factors: environmental, human inappropriate interventions or use. The artefact was in a quite good initial conservation state. It was observed that the wood substrate was of low quality, with knots and rough surfaces, not planed (visible especially on the back side – Fig. 4a). Therefore, the surface and the spaces between the joints accumulated a lot of dirt. Some whitish spots could indicate a biological slight attack and few inactive insect galleries were observed (Fig. 4b). Small areas with fragile wood were identified. Around the nails black spots were evident (Fig. 4c).

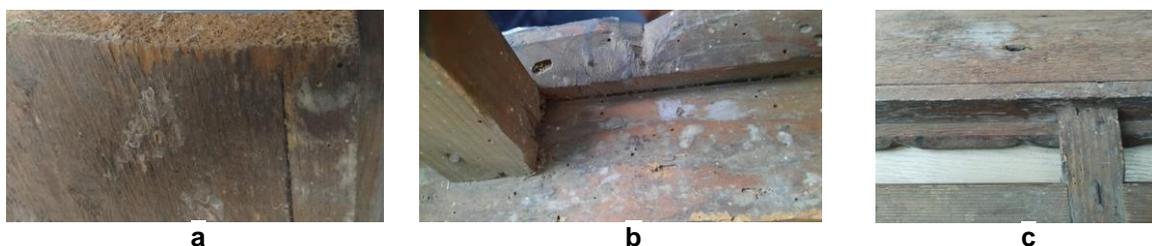


Fig. 4.
Defects on the back side of the object.

The polychrome surface presented different degradations leading to few colour separations or loss of the floral drawing, to fissures, dirt and stains including bitumen spot. Big open crack of wood substrate, covering almost half of the length of the object occurred and affected the painted layer (Fig. 5a). Also, around the holes for hanging there were ruptures of material and fibre separation (Fig. 5b) due to the functional wear. The original colours were faded and dusty.



Fig. 5.
Degradation of wood substrate.

The brown painted area seemed to be the most affected (Fig. 6a). The background looked to be thinner and less adherent than blue or green ones. The knot areas cracked and degraded the painted layer. Some areas presented crackling of painting layer especially on the red, blue and white colours (Fig. 6b). The metal elements had some problems of corrosion and a thin layer of rust covered them.



Fig. 6.
Different degradations of painting layer revealed by dirt, fissures, colour separation.

Conservation and Restoration

The unstable painted layer was consolidated by brushing fish glue (water solution of 6%) and applying Japanese paper on the surface, followed by hot pressing with spatula at 65°C and then cold pressing (Fig. 7a). The paper is next gently removed with cotton pads, moistened in water at room temperature. This procedure was repeated because some areas, especially red and blue colours were very cracked.

The insect galleries from the back of wooden substrate were injected with insecticide Decis in ethyl alcohol. After conditioning, the frail wood areas were consolidated with Paraloid B72 (solution of 5% in ethyl acetate).

The cracks in painted wood surface were filled with putty prepared as a mixture of calcium carbonate and fish glue 6%. The procedure was repeated after 24h until the filing in excess. Prior, a layer of fish bone of 4% was used as primer. After drying of putty, a polishing with a cork and water equalise the surface (Fig. 7b, c).

The cleaning was the next step in conservation. The approach was different on unpainted and painted surfaces. After pre-testing different solutions the unpainted area was cleaned with Pronto cleaning solution for wood.

For the painted area a standard cleaning solutions containing turpentine, ethyl alcohol, and linseed oil were tested initially. Then a solution consisting of 50% isopropyl alcohol, 25% ammonia, 25% water was employed (Fig. 7d). The operation was gentle because the intense blue and brown colours were more sensitive, at risk of removal. Chromatic integration was performed with water-based colours in “lines” and “points” technique, on limited areas, only necessary (Fig. 7e, f).

In the following images are presented the sequences of conservation-restoration process.

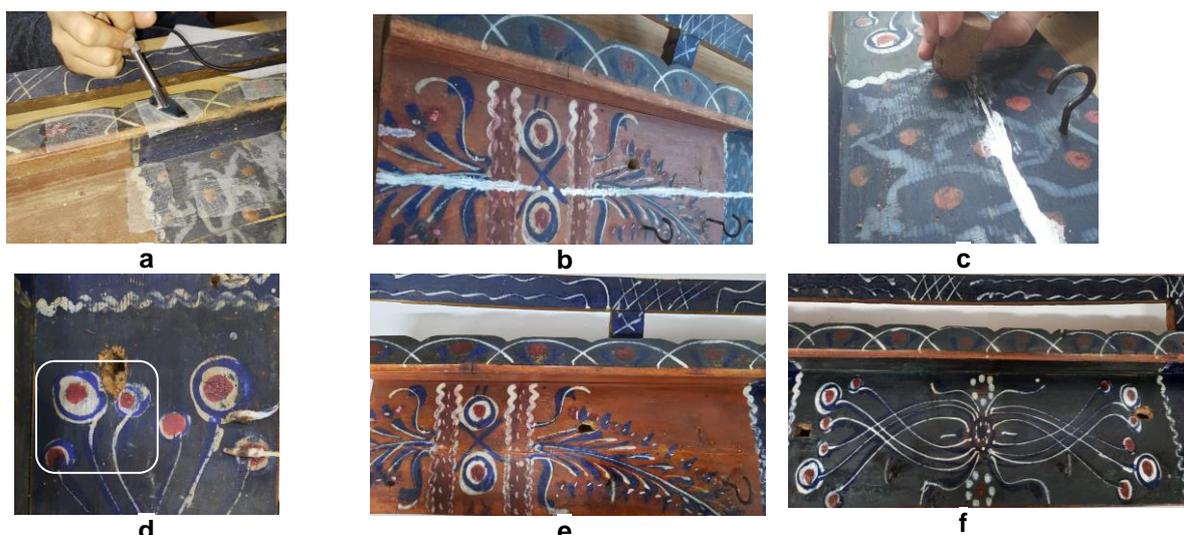


Fig. 7.
Steps in restoration of painted surface.

The painted surface was finished with Dammar varnish in turpentine (12% concentration) in a thin layer.

Also, the back side was protected with insecticide-fungicide primer Proxilin, brushed in excess (Fig. 8a).

The metal hooks were dismantled, treated by Complexon (enveloped in wet cotton padding for 24h) and then washed and degreased with alcohol.

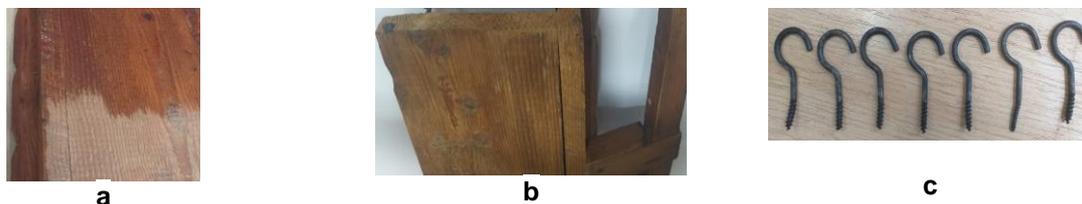


Fig. 8.
Appearance of wood and metal after treatment.

In order to prevent further rusting, a final treatment with tannin (solution 10% in water) was applied on preheated surfaces. This gave a nice black aspect to the metallic elements (Fig. 8c).

The final state after restoration is illustrated in Fig. 9.



Fig. 9.
The final state of wooden painted hanger.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the wide variety of painted furniture from Transylvania, the conservation-restoration of these objects is a challenge with every case study.

The restoration of the polychrome artefact was carried out in accordance with code of ethics, maintaining his artistic significance and authenticity.

Moreover, the hanger presented in this paper is important for understanding the typology and decoration of Romanian furniture and also for learning more about traditions, crafts, communities and their involvement in cultural heritage protection and promotion.

Valuable information, helpful for conservators and restorers can be obtained by scientific investigation of pigments. In this case, no necessity for such procedure was established.

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